



## Supporting Your Child in Returning to School

We are all looking forward to seeing your children return to school after the weeks of home learning due to COVID-19. In addition to meeting our students' learning needs, we also want to ensure their mental wellness is supported during this stressful time. Here are some tips for helping your child prepare for the return to school.

### Take care of yourself

It's normal to experience many emotions throughout this COVID situation. Please know that you're not alone in feeling this way and that there is no right way to feel.

With your children returning to school, you may experience some new feelings or increased stress. The most important thing to remember is that dealing with your own emotions effectively makes you more able to support your children.

Some general strategies to take care of your own emotions include:

- Be aware of your own emotions and thoughts.
- Take a break when you are not in control of your own emotions. Tell your family members that you need 5 or 10 minutes to yourself.
- Practice deep breathing. Focus on the physical sensation of your breath, and allow other thoughts to fade to the background. Count to five while you inhale, hold for two seconds, and then count to five as you exhale. Repeating this several times can be quite relaxing.
- Get enough exercise. Try going for a walk as a family. Getting outside and being active are great ways to relieve stress.
- Make sure you are getting enough sleep. Keeping a stable sleep schedule is especially important when other aspects of our usual routine are disrupted.
- Be patient with yourself ... we're all figuring this out together!

### Reassure your child that the school building is safe

Some children may find the thought of returning to school stressful because of the threat posed by COVID-19, while others might not have any reservations at all. If your child is expressing concerns about returning to school, there are several things you can do to help them:

1. Find out what they know about COVID-19. If they have questions, answer them honestly if you know the information they are asking about. If not, try to find out by reviewing a reliable source like Shared Health, the World Health Organization, Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, or Health Canada. Keep your answers simple, factual and appropriate for your child's age and level of understanding.
2. Acknowledge their concerns, and tell them that it is understandable that they are feeling worried.
3. Review the new process for coming to school with them so that they understand what their school day will look like. Reassure them that these steps are being taken to ensure everyone's safety, and that following these steps will help them stay healthy.
4. Ask them to think of a list of positive things that they can do at school that they can't do at home.
5. Assure them that these measures are temporary during the COVID-19 pandemic, and that they will eventually be able to enjoy a more typical school experience – even though we don't know when that will be.



## Help your child focus on what they CAN control

There are many uncertainties about the COVID-19 pandemic that cause us to feel stressed. How long will the pandemic last? How long will I have to work from home? How long until the schools fully open? Will I or my loved ones get sick?

We are not in control of the answers to these questions, and spending too much time worrying about them will only make us feel worse. To feel better, we must accept what we cannot control and instead focus on what we can. Here are some things that your child CAN control on a daily basis:

- Washing their hands regularly
- Getting exercise every day
- Spending time outside
- Their breathing
- Treating others with kindness
- Working on their schoolwork
- Talking with their friends or family members on the phone or online

## Reach out for help when needed

Your community school team includes guidance counsellors, a school psychologist, and a school social worker. They will be happy to discuss any concerns you have about your child's emotional wellbeing and work with you to find a solution.

Please contact your school's guidance counsellor if you feel your child requires additional support at this time.

If you feel your child is experiencing more severe problems with their mood, anxiety, or behaviour, it may be appropriate to seek advice from your doctor.

## Further reading

How can we talk to kids about COVID-19? Be "realistically reassuring"

<https://www.cps.ca/blog-blogue/how-can-we-talk-to-kids-about-covid-19>

Helping Children and Teens Cope with Anxiety About COVID-19

<https://pulse.seattlechildrens.org/helping-children-and-teens-cope-with-anxiety-covid-19>

Helping Children and Teens Cope with Stressful Public Events

<https://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/disaster>

COVID-19: 3P's to defeat it

<https://www.covid19manitoba.ca>

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